

OUTDOOR ALLIANCE

June 29, 2021

Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto
Chair, Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining
313 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Sen. Mike Lee
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining
361A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: June 16 Public Lands, Forests, and Mining Subcommittee legislative hearing

On behalf of the human powered outdoor recreation community, thank you for holding the June 16 legislative hearing to consider a number of bills of significance for our community.

Outdoor Alliance is a coalition of ten member-based organizations representing the human powered outdoor recreation community. The coalition includes Access Fund, American Canoe Association, American Whitewater, International Mountain Bicycling Association, Winter Wildlands Alliance, The Mountaineers, the American Alpine Club, the Mazamas, Colorado Mountain Club, and Surfrider Foundation and represents the interests of the millions of Americans who climb, paddle, mountain bike, backcountry ski and snowshoe, and enjoy coastal recreation on our nation's public lands, waters, and snowscapes.

Our comments on individual bills follow.

The Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy (CORE) Act (S. 173)

Outdoor Alliance strongly supports the thoughtful protections embodied in the CORE Act. In addition to its essential protections for conservation values, the bill also protects hundreds of miles of trails, scores of climbing sites, more than 20 miles of whitewater paddling, and valued backcountry ski terrain.



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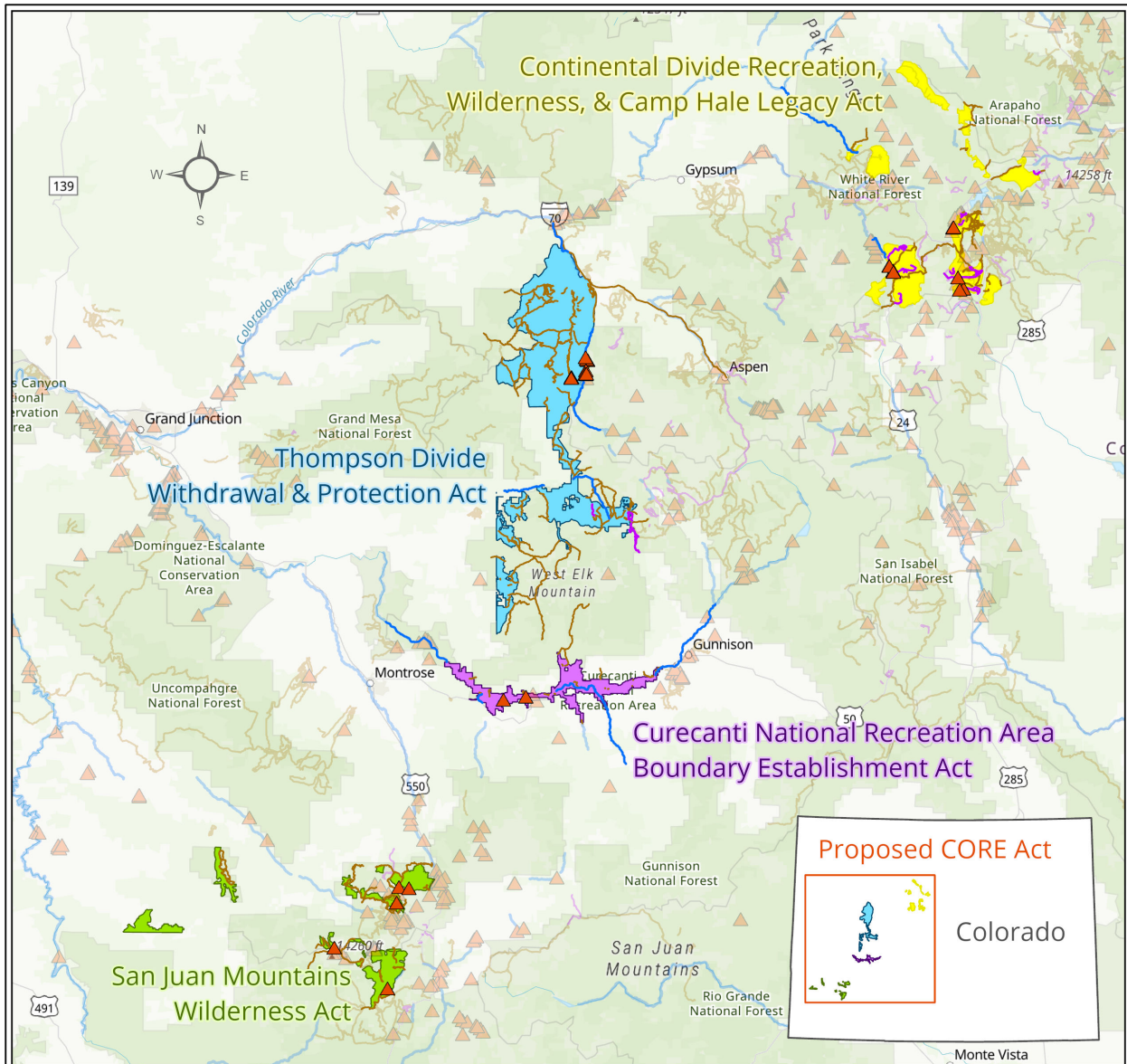
In the San Juans, the Sheep Mountain Special Management Area protects backcountry ski terrain near Lizard Head Pass and creates management for the Ophir Valley area for new mountain biking trails near the town of Ophir. The Liberty Bell and Whitehouse Wilderness additions protect world-class hiking and climbing opportunities in the iconic Mount Sneffels range while allowing for a trail corridor for the iconic Liberty Bell/Hardrock 100 trail. The Tenmile Wilderness and Recreation Management Areas provide opportunities for long ridgeline technical traverses, challenging backcountry ski terrain, and world class mountain biking, and the Spraddle Creek Wilderness addition provides a primitive backcountry area in close proximity to downtown Vail while keeping the future mountain bike extension of the North Vail Trail viable. These designations allow for a new Wilderness-urban interface that provides a unique opportunity to experience and protect these important landscapes.

All of the proposed designations in the CORE Act have been carefully vetted by recreation groups, and designations protect and enhance recreational opportunities like hiking, climbing, skiing, and mountain biking. The mineral withdrawals and resource protections in this bill further preserve the scenic and natural qualities of these landscapes.

We are particularly pleased to support legislation that designates Wilderness while also using other protective designations where more appropriate. This approach is essential, in particular, for protecting and enhancing mountain biking opportunities. Because of the collaborative approach employed in the bill's development, embracing input from local and national mountain biking stakeholders among others, the legislation enjoys broad support from the mountain biking community. This approach—embracing alternative designations where appropriate to protect both existing and prospective mountain biking opportunities—should be considered a model for other protective designation efforts around the country.



OUTDOOR ALLIANCE



Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy Act

- Continental Divide Recreation, Wilderness, and Camp Hale Legacy Act
- Curecanti National Recreation Area Boundary Establishment Act
- San Juan Mountains Wilderness Act
- Thompson Divide Withdrawal and Protection Act

- ▲ Rock Climbing
- Whitewater Paddling River
- Backcountry Ski Trail
- Trail



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Wild Olympics Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (S. 455)

The Wild Olympics legislation will protect 126,500 acres of Wilderness and 464 river miles as Wild and Scenic on the Olympic Peninsula and preserve salmon streams and wild lands adjacent to Olympic National Park. In addition to protecting conservation values, the bill protects hundreds of miles of trails, scores of climbing sites, dozens of whitewater paddling destinations, and valued backcountry ski terrain.

The Olympic Peninsula, with Olympic National Park and the adjacent Forest Service lands and rivers, is an important part of the outdoor recreation landscape in Washington, and preserving these iconic lands and rivers will benefit the state's growing outdoor recreation economy. Outdoor recreation in Washington generates \$26.2 billion in annual consumer spending and supports 201,600 direct jobs.

While most of the prime Olympic Peninsula mountaineering destinations are within the Olympic National Park, several summits and crags of interest lay outside of existing Park and Wilderness boundaries on the Olympic National Forest. The Wild Olympics Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers Act promises to provide lasting protection to places valued by climbers, locally and around the world. Proposed additions to the Mount Skokomish Wilderness, for example, will protect scrambling and climbing objectives such as Mount Washington, Mount Pershing, Jefferson Peak, Mount Ellinor, and the nearby Ellinor Towers. In the spring, Mount Ellinor is known as a destination for backcountry skiers.

For whitewater paddlers, the region is unique because the watersheds that radiate out from the Olympic Mountains receive several feet of precipitation each year, providing an incredible number of river miles in a small geographic area. Dozens of whitewater runs pass through towering ancient forests and moss-covered gorges. The rivers also serve as a conveyor belt for sand that forms the beaches and surf breaks on the wild Washington Coast.

Because of the collaborative approach employed in the bill's development, embracing input from local and national mountain biking stakeholders among others, the legislation enjoys broad support from the mountain biking community. We are particularly pleased to support legislation that designates Wilderness while also using other protective designations where appropriate. The mountain biking



OUTDOOR ALLIANCE

loop trail along the Dungeness River passes through ancient forests and along the banks of a wild river. By including the trail within the Wild and Scenic river corridor but outside of proposed Wilderness, a designation is applied that will protect and enhance the mountain biking experience alongside conservation values.



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Modernizing Access to Our Public Land (MAPLand) Act (S. 904)

Outdoor Alliance supports the Modernizing Access to Our Public Lands (MAPLand) Act. The bill promises to support public access to public lands by ensuring that information regarding access, including easements, is readily accessible.

Moreover, better availability of information regarding the permissibility of various activities in particular settings will improve resource stewardship and reduce user conflict by reducing the frequency of inadvertent impermissible use. For example, motorized users will be less likely to unintentionally travel onto nonmotorized landscapes when information regarding permissible use is available in digital form. Private landowners will also benefit through fewer unintended incursions from visitors to adjacent public lands and waters, further reducing conflict.

With the recent passage of the Great American Outdoors Act, more resources are now available to help facilitate access to public lands and waters. An important first step to ensuring that those resources are efficiently deployed is to make sure that the public has access to existing easements that may not be readily identifiable because of the backlog of agency information digitization efforts.

We strongly support this effort to make agency geospatial data consistent and more readily available.

Bonneville Shoreline Trail Advancement Act (S. 1222)

Outdoor Alliance strongly supports the Bonneville Shoreline Trail Advancement Act. The BSTAA will help facilitate completion of the multiple-use 280-mile Bonneville Shoreline Trail (BST). The proposed boundary adjustments will remove 326.27 acres from Wilderness management across 19 carefully drawn areas, and these adjustments will be offset by the addition of an equal area of new Wilderness protection in Mill Creek Canyon. These adjustments will ensure bicycle access on the BST and allow for work on the trail to proceed using tools impermissible under Wilderness management. In addition to the direct benefits of the trail itself, the BST is a central component for trail planning efforts for jurisdictions across the Wasatch Front.



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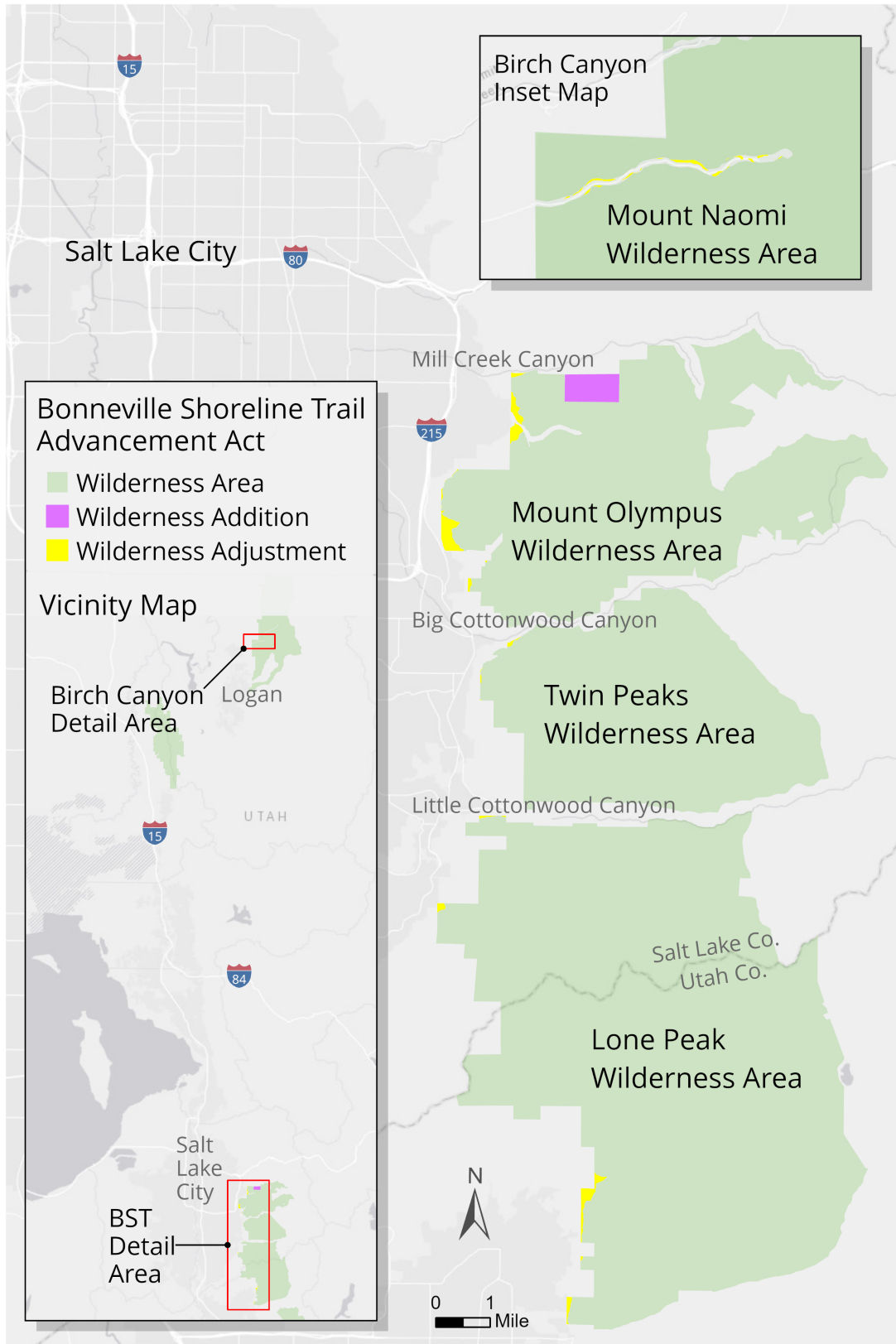
The outdoor recreation community strongly supports the Wilderness Act. An outgrowth of that support and our fundamental commitment to protection of Wilderness includes a sensitivity to the need to maintain strong public support for Wilderness protections. We believe that goal of maintaining broad public support is advanced by an openness to judicious adjustments to existing Wilderness in carefully considered settings. Common sense, modest adjustments, offset by new Wilderness additions, can be an important tool for ensuring that existing boundaries do not create insurmountable obstacles to sustainable recreation in places where relatively minor adjustments can be made without undercutting the values that animate the Wilderness Act. We believe that these conditions are met here.

Additionally, Outdoor Alliance and the outdoor recreation community remain committed to the success of the Central Wasatch Commission (CWC) and Mountain Accord process. Wilderness boundary adjustment to facilitate completion of the Bonneville Shoreline Trail has been at times a component of the CWC process, and we would like to reiterate our commitment to seeing the goals of the CWC realized. Specifically, we strongly support sustainable solutions to the area's transportation needs and legislation to protect conservation values through new Wilderness designations; protect valued backcountry ski terrain from encroachment by ski area development through land exchanges; facilitate conservation of the watershed; and support sustainable access and maintenance of recreation infrastructure for dispersed human-powered outdoor recreation.

We believe that this bill represents a step forward in realizing a broader vision for conservation and sustainable outdoor recreation in the Wasatch.



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Human Powered Travel in Wilderness Act (S. 1686)

Since its enactment in 1964, the Wilderness Act has proven itself to be one of our country's most far-sighted laws, protecting wild places for their own sake, for their ecological importance, and for the importance to people of the opportunity to experience vast, wild landscapes. Outdoor Alliance supports the Wilderness Act wholeheartedly.

Because of the strength of Wilderness protections—as well as the importance of maintaining deep public support for this bedrock conservation law—Wilderness designations should be made carefully and with the broadest possible stakeholder engagement and support. Wilderness is best designated when it is approached collaboratively, in recognition of the full diversity of ways in which people wish to sustainably enjoy and engage with their public lands, and at a landscape scale, allowing for more flexible protective designations in some areas.

This approach has not always been followed. At times, mountain bikers have been left out of Wilderness designation conversations; at other times, mountain bikers have engaged in designation processes in a spirit of collaboration and compromise, but found their interests cut out at the eleventh hour. This has justifiably resulted in hard feelings, and it can be difficult to accept why a quiet, sustainable, human-powered activity is excluded from wide areas of public lands for reasons that can feel arbitrary or preferential.

The outdoor recreation community strongly supports and benefits from the Wilderness Act. We also believe it absolutely essential that mountain bikers and others engaged in sustainable recreation activities be included in land management decision making; be afforded opportunities to enjoy their public lands, from frontcountry to backcountry; and have good reason to believe that our country's system for protecting public lands—viewed as a whole—works for them.

We believe it is possible to accomplish these objectives without making changes to the Wilderness Act.

Foremost, we believe that the solution to challenges regarding Wilderness is to protect more landscapes in ways that embrace opportunities for sustainable recreation of all types. Where Wilderness is designated, it often may be appropriate



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that broader contiguous landscapes be protected using designations that support a full range of sustainable recreation activities in addition to Wilderness designations. Several of the other bills in this hearing adeptly follow this approach. Thoughtful management may also require “cherry stemming” trails by maintaining non-Wilderness corridors in some areas. Where existing or prospective mountain biking opportunities are closed off, mitigation, by developing riding opportunities in nearby areas, should be standard. Bicycles should be managed precisely, not through careless shorthands like the often used phrase “motorized or mechanized,” which should be abandoned.

There continue to be outstanding opportunities for new Wilderness designations. Many of these designations should be pursued, however, in conjunction with alternative designations on broader landscapes, protecting opportunities for a range of outdoor recreation experiences. For some landscapes, this might mean smaller Wilderness areas than proposed as the most aggressive alternatives. Done thoughtfully and collaboratively, however, these mixed designations can provide greater ecological benefits and more opportunities for outdoor recreation and its attendant economic benefits, while building a broader base of public support and maintaining the goodwill necessary for the Wilderness Act to thrive for generations to come.

Approaching landscapes at scale and moving away from binary decisions between Wilderness and lands managed as multiple use is also essential for providing the range of opportunities that supports equitable access and the outdoor recreation economy. High quality recreation opportunities can occur in a range of settings, many of which deserve recreation-focused protections and management. These landscapes make invaluable contributions to clean air, clean water, and healthy wildlife populations; support gateway public lands communities and recreation economies; and allow more Americans—from urban to rural—to experience their public lands in meaningful ways that foster a sense of shared ownership and stewardship. Land managers and Congress need to employ a range of designations to meet these needs.

In recognition of the need to protect more landscapes for sustainable outdoor recreational pursuits, Outdoor Alliance strongly supports S. 1874, the “Recreation Not Red-Tape Act.” Most valuably, this bill will help Congress designate new National Recreation Areas by instructing land managers to inventory for areas of



OUTDOOR ALLIANCE

recreational significance, empowering Congress to thoughtfully protect landscapes and giving land management planners and citizen collaboratives more tools to reduce conflict. New National Recreation Areas will help to complement Wilderness designations and ensure that a range of recreational opportunities are provided for on public lands.

With these principles in mind, we believe that mountain biking and opportunities can be protected and enhanced while maintaining the integrity of the Wilderness Act.

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Outdoor Alliance appreciates the subcommittee's attention to the bills considered in this hearing, and we look forward to continuing to work with you.

Best regards,



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Policy Director
Outdoor Alliance

cc: Adam Cramer, Chief Executive Officer, Outdoor Alliance
Chris Winter, Executive Director, Access Fund
Beth Spilman, Executive Director, American Canoe Association
Mark Singleton, Executive Director, American Whitewater
Kent McNeill, CEO, International Mountain Bicycling Association
Todd Walton, Executive Director, Winter Wildlands Alliance
Tom Vogl, Chief Executive Officer, The Mountaineers
Mitsu Iwasaki, Chief Executive Officer, American Alpine Club
Sarah Bradham, Interim Executive Director, the Mazamas
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Chad Nelson, Chief Executive Officer, Surfrider Foundation

